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# The Healing Power of Darkness



Jeff opens his blinds each morning to the glow of twilight on the horizon. He is not groggy or stiff. He yawns and stretches, feeling completely restored. He then enters his meditation space to face east. Raising his arms out to his sides, he chants a strange, sonorous invocation:

*“Hail unto thee who art Ra in thy rising!  
Even unto thee who art Ra in thy strength  
Who travellest over the heavens in thy bark  
At the uprising of the Sun  
Tahuti standeth in his splendor at the prow*

*And Ra-Hoor abideth at the helm  
Hail unto thee from the abodes of Night!"*

It may not be obvious, but this odd little ritual gives us an example of what mysticism is all about. Mysticism is not just an intense form of religion. It's an ancient technology that some people still use essentially to hack into their own biology. They use it to keep themselves healthy, well adapted, and connected to the universe. In this case, Jeff's invocation of the sun shows us that light is an important aspect of that connection. And so is darkness.

Ritual isn't the only form of technology Jeff uses. After the Sun goes down, you might see him wearing a fashionable-looking pair of eyeglasses — except for that strange orange tint. This kind of eyewear is another bit of technology he uses. He is controlling the kind of light that enters his eyes, signaling his brain so that his body stays in tune with the Earth's natural cycle of day and night. Yes, the right kind of light and the right kind of darkness are super-important to your health.

Civilized human beings like Jeff, you, and me — thanks to our deeply ingrained cultural beliefs—live stilted lives, cut off from the Earth. Jeff may love trees and other living things, but unfortunately, a mossy, emerald-green forest is something that he only gets to witness through a television screen. Or if he is lucky enough to travel and see the world, the beautiful vista of the Grand Canyon is little more than a passing parade of rock formations, shrubs, and clouds — all of which he experiences only remotely from the comfort of an upholstered chair as he sips his chilled beverage, walled off from the sun behind UV-resistant automobile glass. The thought of leaving his air-conditioned car and hiking down into the canyon in 110-degree heat doesn't even occur to him. Most people, especially in developed countries, are detached from nature in this way. We live out our lives in the protective bubble of civilization, and our 21st century bodies receive only limited stimulation from the raw elements of the natural world. This is *not* the way our bodies have evolved to function.

The comforts of civilization are an extremely recent development in the latest million or so years of our evolutionary timeline, and as soothing as these comforts are to us, our biology is not responding well to them.

This predicament is particularly true in regard to light and darkness. Thanks to the conveniences of modern living, Jeff still keeps himself drenched in artificial light well past sundown. Many more people avoid darkness entirely, keeping on some kind of electric light almost 24/7, to the point that they have no idea just how ominously dark the night can get in a real-life forest. Most city dwellers, thanks to the preponderance of urban light pollution, have never even seen what a clear moonless sky really looks like at night. Fluorescent bulbs, television screens, and smartphones bathe us in high frequency light and make sure our bodies are almost constantly in a “daylight” environment. The sun goes down each evening, and we don’t even notice. And neither does our human metabolism. As a result, our daylight hormones continue to dominate our bodily functions well into the night. Not good for health!

### **The Importance of Environmental Signals**

Jeff’s ritual practice, to some extent, helps him remedy this unnatural disconnect from the Earth’s daily light cycle. Thanks to a daily set of sun adorations and some tweaks to the lighting in his home, he no longer needs coffee to wake up in the morning. He no longer has trouble going to sleep at night, and his brain performs much better at work because his body is in sync with the rotation of the Earth. It seems ironic, but Jeff is relying on an ancient form of technology (ritual) to stave off the damaging effects of a modern form of technology (artificial light).

In total, Jeff performs four different invocations to the sun each day: morning, noon, sunset, and midnight. He intentionally personifies the sun and speaks to it, visualizing its comings and goings. He deliberately feels the white heat of its noon presence and the deep stillness of its midnight absence. This practice serves as a rhythmic stimulus. In a sense, Jeff is tricking his body into responding to light and darkness as though he were still intimate with nature like his prehistoric ancestors were. He uses ritual to manipulate his body’s natural circadian rhythm, which helps him optimize his hormonal health.

*Isn’t darkness an ancient evil? Isn’t the modern-day city, as a sanctuary of unending light, a manifestation of the divine?*

The essential idea here is that a human body that is properly signaled becomes healthier. A body that does *not* receive timely signals from the environment gets out of touch with the Earth and becomes weak and sickly.

Sounds pretty weird, right? Why wouldn't our modern, sheltered lifestyle be *good* for our health? Isn't darkness an ancient evil? Isn't the modern-day city, as a sanctuary of unending light, a manifestation of the divine? Don't the walls and roof around you protect you from nature's dark, unruly elements: wind, cold, heat, and harsh solar radiation — chaotic forces that would otherwise make you sick or give you skin cancer? Well sure, to some degree. But most humans get *too much* protection, and we don't seem to know what is truly good for us. Our lives are so sheltered that we actually get sick and cancerous not *because* of our exposure to the elements but because of our *lack* of exposure. From a caveman's point of view, we modern humans have become so weak and riddled with chronic disease because we are so pampered. We are addicted to a comfortable way of life that fails to stimulate our bodies into a state of robust health. To be truly healthy, our bodies need to be challenged more often by the opposites found in nature: heat and cold, summer and winter, exercise and rest, stress and calm, feast and famine...and of course, light and darkness.



We are already aware of the importance of physical exercise and rest. We may even know that the benefits of eating lots of nutritious food are even better when we practice fasting. But the importance of other opposites, such as heat and cold and light and darkness, has, as yet, escaped our attention.

This means that the two commonly known pillars of health, diet and exercise, are not necessarily enough. We need some help from a third pillar: environment. Medical science is only just discovering what mystics have known for thousands of years. Our bodies require sharply contrasting signals from the environment in order to thrive. These signals regulate our bodies and prompt us on an unconscious, cellular level to stay fit.

To our caveman ancestors, the norms of modern life — air conditioning all year round, an unceasing abundance of food, artificial light all night long — would not be normal at all. They would be downright weird. So, it should come as no surprise that mystics throughout the centuries have resorted to all kinds of weirdness (sweat lodges and cold showers, feasting and fasting, hyperventilation and breath-holding, sun gazing and meditating in the dark, and more) in an attempt to bring extreme opposites back into our lives. And why do they do this? To signal our bodies. To restore us back to the primal consciousness that we have lost.

It may sound like bad news when a medicine man tells you that you are sick because of your comfortable, civilized lifestyle. However, he's also got some good news for you. To return to your primal state, you don't necessarily need to go on a grueling nature hike every day or sleep out under the stars every night in 30-degree weather. Or risk life and limb hunting a woolly mammoth. You simply need to be mindful of the stimuli that your body requires from the environment. Mystical techniques can provide you with artificial methods for mimicking those stimuli. These simple signals can serve you well, helping your body anticipate life's challenges and maintain a more intimate relationship with the universe around you. And when your body functions in harmony with nature, it is that much easier for you to become enlightened. To flow. To experience oneness with the universe. You can still enjoy the luxuries of air conditioning and hot showers — as long as you make room in your life for some of the variations in extremes that your body needs to stay healthy. Variations such as light and darkness.

Yes, ritual — like any technology — is artificial, but it is often enough to help us remember the importance of natural forces to our primal physiology. All technology — not just ritual — can be used toward this end. Instead of sunbathing, we can use infrared or UVB light bulbs. Instead of jumping into cold mountain lakes, we can

practice cryotherapy or take ice baths. Instead of laboring over the heat and smoke of a campfire, we can relax at night in the warm glow of candles and the soothing fragrance of incense. Instead of experiencing actual famine like our ancestors did, we can practice intermittent fasting. Instead of holding our breaths to forage for food underwater, we can practice modern-day hypoxic training techniques at a gym, or ancient *pranayama* techniques in a temple. Remember that “technology” is more than just computers and robots. Technology in a greater sense involves the application of specially designed techniques. So even the development of a daily habit can be considered a form of technology. A way of “hacking into our biology.” When we know about the environmental factors that stimulate our bodies to become healthy, we can reorient all of our technology to provide those environmental factors. Instead of making us weaker, our technology can make us stronger. And yes, there is technology available today that can bring darkness back into your life — without necessitating that you abandon your smartphone and lose yourself in a dark forest every night.

### **Afraid of the Dark?**

Are there saber-toothed tigers lurking in your subconscious?

As we will see, exposure to darkness is as important to our hormonal health as is exposure to light, but we very likely have a deep-seated evolutionary trauma built into our biology, and that trauma makes our entire species afraid of the dark. To explore this problem, let’s consider mankind’s fear of the night.

Why are so many children “afraid of the dark”? They seem to have an almost universal fear of nighttime monsters with big claws and teeth. This fear appears to lessen as we enter adulthood, but does it ever truly go away? An explanation for this childhood phobia, proposed by evolutionary biology, is perhaps even more terrifying than the monsters our children envision lurking in the corners of the bedroom.

Our prehistoric ancestors were once hunted for food, just like any other vulnerable animal living in the great outdoors. And what did those big, scary predators normally eat? They usually went after the young. Not only were the cubs, pups, kits, chicks, fawns...and human children...more tasty than adults (veal, after all, is quite the delicacy), but younger animals were much weaker and easier to chomp and carry off. A saber-toothed tiger who happened across a bunch of sleeping Neanderthals at night

could make easy pickings of a child before the bigger, stronger adults had a chance to shake off their sleep and figure out what was going on.



Smilodon (Smithsonian Institution)

This means that our children's fear of the dark could very well be epigenetic. That is, children are afraid of the dark because our ancestors experienced a million or more years of repeated trauma. So many children in our genetic lineage have been killed in their sleep that the horror has been, perhaps, etched into our collective unconscious. What else would explain a child's "irrational" fear of being attacked at night? This means, of course, that just as the darkness has become universally terrifying, light has simultaneously become beautiful and reassuring. Because of so many predator-haunted nights in our evolutionary past, the sun that comes up each morning is that much more glorious to us.

Consider for a moment mankind's almost universal love of gold, blond hair, and flowers. What are these to us but images of the sun? We have evolved to respond to the color yellow and to rays of dawn as symbols of hope, good fortune, redemption, etc.

The sunrise, for us, has become synonymous with the relief our prehistoric ancestors felt after many a night of terror.



This apparent epigenetic memory might explain why civilization is so in love with light and so at war with darkness. In our moral belief systems the world over, why are evil and darkness almost completely synonymous? Why are modern cities drenched so excessively in artificial light all night long? Why can't modern adults seem to sleep unless comforted by the radiant glow of a television? Are we still afraid to just lie there in the looming darkness? If we turn off all the bulbs and gadgets, are there ghostly remnants of claws and fangs still lurking in the shadows?

It is important to accept this deeply etched fear and relax into it so that we can once again surrender to the night and appreciate a more pronounced contrast between light and darkness. It is crucial to your hormonal health that you not only get a little bit of direct sun each day but that you also sleep in complete darkness each night.

### **How Does Light Signal the Body?**

Our bodies have evolved to respond to light in different ways depending on its wavelength. Different colors have different effects:

**Red light:** The red and orange light of twilight stimulates collagen production, making our skin thick, young, and healthy. Firelight does the same. Over a million years of our ancestors sleeping by the glowing embers of a campfire have created a physiology that responds to red light by relaxing and healing. If you are going to use a nightlight for your trips to the bathroom, make sure it is red or orange. That will keep your body in a restorative nighttime mode and make sure that the healing benefits of darkness continue until morning.

**Blue light:** The blue of the sky actually serves a biological function. When it enters our eyes, it signals our brains to stop secreting melatonin and start producing serotonin and cortisol. Serotonin and cortisol are daytime hormones. They are associated with both happiness and stress. In other words, they help us gear up for the play and work of the daylight world. Blue light gets us pumped and ready to “seize the day.”

On the down side, blue light, for some reason, is very taxing on the human retina. It produces a lot of free radicals in our eyes.

**Ultraviolet light:** The sun also floods us with ultraviolet light, and that stimulates our eyes to produce antioxidants that clean up those free radicals created by the abundance of blue light. Yes, blue light causes damage, but ultraviolet light signals us to heal that damage even as it is occurring.

Like infrared light, the ultraviolet spectrum is invisible to the naked eye. Nonetheless, our bodies appear to detect it, respond to it, and feed on it. Our skin actually manufactures “food” when sunlight penetrates into it. The term “photosynthesis,” you may recall from Biology 101, literally means “creating food from light.” Plants do it. And most interestingly, we animals do it too. We don’t need sunlight to the extent that green plants do, but we still need it. As already mentioned, our bodies produce antioxidants from the sun’s UV light. They also produce proteins, which work to repair damage to our DNA, and nitric oxide, which dilates our blood vessels and improves circulation. In men, UV light stimulates the production of testosterone and increases libido. Especially when UV light shines directly on the testicles.

Most dermatologists will tell you that ultraviolet light out under the open sky will damage your cells and cause skin cancer. However, what they don't tell you is that it also stimulates our cells to repair themselves, thereby offsetting that damage. As it turns out, modern research appears to be showing that moderate sun exposure actually has more of a protective effect against skin cancer than does the avoidance of sunlight altogether. This may seem counter-intuitive, but think about it. People who stay out of the sun most of the time are ill equipped to deal with it when they are exposed for more than an hour. They burn easily, and it is frequent sunburn, not necessarily sun exposure, that is linked to skin cancer.

Your dermatologist is probably going to keep warning you to stay out of the sun and to slather on the SPF 15 at the beach, but consider this: If we have evolved into homo sapiens by living out under an open sky, don't you think our bodies would have evolved mechanisms that respond to that environment in healthy ways? And how might our bodies function — or malfunction — when deprived of those environmental signals? Since we already know that UV light stimulates cell repair and vitamin D and nitric oxide production, perhaps UV light serves other vital, health-inducing functions that are as yet undiscovered by science.

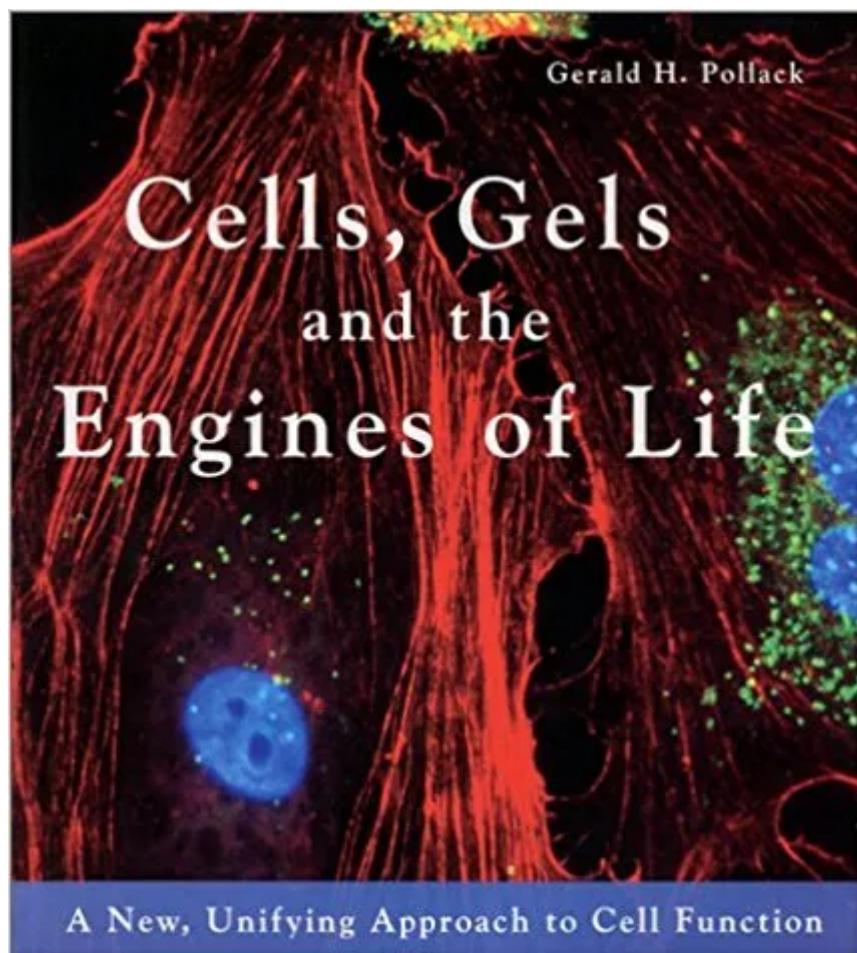
**Infrared light:** This color of light cannot be seen by humans either (well, by most people, anyway), but it can still be felt on our skin as radiant heat. Infrared rays from the sun are soothing at the beach, and they have a fascinating effect on the water in our bodies. In fact, infrared radiation causes water to organize into a gel-like substance called EZ water. Water, under the influence of the sun, shifts its chemical form from H<sub>2</sub>O to H<sub>3</sub>O<sub>2</sub>. This form of water has amazing properties. You can easily recognize it in nature because it glows! Or rather, it fluoresces. It absorbs sunlight and re-emits it in a gorgeous turquoise-colored glow that we all know so well from postcard images. EZ water is common in the sun-heated water of the tropics. It is also found in melted ice, and many frigid mountain streams are noted for having that amazing blue-green glow.



“Glowing” Glacial-Melt Water in New Zealand

EZ water is also called “structured water,” and structured water is essential to all forms of life. It is actually a liquid crystal, and it has an electric charge which helps living fluids — such as sap, blood, and lymph — flow more smoothly. When you bask in the sun or sit in a sauna, you can actually feel the infrared light (heat) entering you, creating a tingling sensation. This tingling we tend to think of as part of the heat sensation, but it is actually an electrical charge. To some extent, water acts as a battery, absorbing energy and producing electrons. You can see the veins in men’s arms stand out as the water in their blood becomes structured and their circulation improves. In the human body, there is no way that the heart alone is strong enough to push blood through so many millions of capillaries in our hands and feet. The electric charge in our blood actually helps propel it through our veins.

Liquid-crystal water? Sounds crazy, right? Don’t believe it? Read this book:



### Types of Light to Avoid

1. **Fluorescent lightbulbs:** Office buildings, to this day, are mostly illuminated by low-cost fluorescent tubes. Fluorescent lighting has a lot of blue in it, and blue light is

stressful on the eyes and brain. As mentioned, it produces a lot of free-radical damage. It is the most difficult frequency of light for the brain to process, so it tends to cause mental fatigue. It should come as no surprise that a life constantly spent in office buildings can lead to both brain fog and macular degeneration. Without the presence of UV light to stimulate antioxidant production, the mitochondria in our eyes become overwhelmed by free radicals, which damages the retina over time. If you work in an office building, it would be a good idea to wear specially designed glasses that filter out some of the blue. And if you use fluorescent lighting at home, it's a good idea to use a special kind of full-spectrum fluorescent light bulbs — and to use them only during the day because they still shed a lot of blue light.

**2. White LED light:** Cheap LED lighting is even worse than fluorescent. It has even more blue in it — as you can easily tell by noticing its harsh, icy glow. Cities across the country have been replacing their incandescent street lamps with cheaper LED lights. This dramatically reduces costs, but it spells disaster to your body's need for equal measures of blue daylight and red-orange light and night. Many cutting edge researchers are predicting a future epidemic of macular degeneration, thanks to modern city lighting, not to mention the hours we spend staring into computer monitors and cell phones (these devices also use LED light technology). It is best to eliminate LED lighting from your home, or to at least get amber-colored (sometimes called “warm glow”) LED lights. These lightbulbs filter out most of the blue. In addition, you can install special software on your computer that removes a lot of the color blue from its LED-monitor display. Cell phones can likewise be set up to limit blue light emissions. The iPhone, for example, has a special feature called “Nightshift,” which bumps the color spectrum of your phone’s display over to amber when the sun goes down.

#### **Types of Light to Seek Out:**

- 1. Full-spectrum lightbulbs:** Use these only during the day. They emit the color blue, but they also provide a fairly healthy multi-color spectrum of light similar to conditions found out under the open sky. Full-spectrum light bulbs are stimulating and healthy. They signal your body to function in daylight mode.
- 2. Incandescent lightbulbs:** These lights still have a significant amount of blue in them, but not nearly as much as fluorescent and LED bulbs. As a result, they do

less damage to your retinas and cause less mental fatigue. Use them only during the day.

3. **Fire/candlelight:** Fire has virtually no blue in it. Its near absence of blue stops daytime hormones in their tracks and signals your pineal gland to secrete melatonin, the master hormone of the night. If you light candles and turn out all the electric lights in your home, you will notice yourself getting sleepy within an hour. Try it. It is an almost instant cure for insomnia.
4. **Halogen:** These lights burn pretty hot, but they also have a more healthy spectrum of light in them. Don't use these lights at night, though. They still emit some blue, which keeps you revved up in daylight mode.
5. **Amber or red LED lighting:** LED lighting is not so bad when the blue gets filtered out of it. If you buy the kind of bulb that emits an amber glow, you will be able to keep it lit at night without disrupting the nighttime phase of your body's natural hormonal cycle.



An Amber or “Warm-Glow” LED Light Bulb

### How Does Darkness Signal the Body?

Now we come to one of the major reasons modern humans get chronic illnesses: *We do not experience enough darkness.* As mentioned, darkness shuts down the production of serotonin and cortisol. Also, it signals the pineal gland to start producing melatonin. Melatonin is the hormone of the night, and it is important to your health beyond measure.

Melatonin is one of nature’s most powerful antioxidants, which means that if you sleep in darkness the way our ancestors did, your body is doing a major clean-up job throughout the entire night. However, if you expose yourself to computer screens and other harsh blue light sources before bed, you may very well end up sleeping with

stress hormones circulating through your body well into the night — that is, if you can even sleep at all.

Melatonin has also been shown to prevent inflammation. Big time. And it stimulates the immune system (particularly the thymus gland) to become more active during the night. Because of this, combined with its antioxidant properties, it has been shown to slow the aging of your brain. In fact, melatonin causes brain cells to shrink by 60%, which allows fluid to flow between them and “rinse out” the brain while you sleep!

Most notably, melatonin is a super-powered cancer-fighter. It has been shown to inhibit many types of cancer, particularly breast and prostate cancer. It inhibits blood flow to tumors, it reduces cell-division (which keeps cancer from growing quickly), and it up-regulates the production of interleukin-2, a substance that helps your body's immune cells target and kill cancer cells. Doctors often prescribe melatonin as a supplement to patients undergoing chemotherapy because it has been shown to increased the longevity of those who survive the treatment. Given these benefits of melatonin, it should come as no surprise that people who work night shifts (particularly in cheap fluorescent light) have greatly increased chances of getting cancer.



Blue-Blocking Glasses

## How to Benefit from Darkness

1. Use blackout curtains or a window shade that completely blocks out all light from outside. Especially unhealthy LED street lights.
2. Use an amber or red nightlight for bathroom trips at night (no other lights!)
3. Bring a sleeping mask with you when traveling. You never know when you might need to sleep in a hotel room with unsatisfactory lighting.
4. Perform rituals that celebrate both light and darkness. You can learn rituals from shamanic, Christian, or other sources. Here's a link to Jeff's unusual ancient-Egyptian-themed rituals: [\*Liber Resh\*](#).
5. Get morning sun! The amount of UV light in the morning (before 10 a.m.) is the least damaging. The more serotonin you produce from sunlight during the day, the more melatonin your pineal gland can make from it at night. And the best time to produce that serotonin is in the morning — because of its mood-enhancing effects.
6. Wear blue-blocking glasses at night. After the sun goes down, orange lenses that block blue light will help you mimic the environmental conditions of our prehistoric ancestors. Even though you might still find yourself answering emails over a toxic LED display, these glasses will block out the blue, tricking your body

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of blue-blockers alone can be amazing because you no longer wake up tired and sore in the morning. The body, properly shielded from light, heals itself just fine.



